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ABSTRACT

The philosophy upon which this monograph is based is the belief that one of the responsibilities of the schools is to prepare all youth to become active and well-informed participants in a democratic society. Alternatives and options are recommended for improving the school curriculum, governance, teacher effectiveness, testing, discipline, and pedagogy. Among the options offered are: (1) abandoning centrally mandated textbooks; (2) instituting peer review of teachers by their colleagues; (3) replacing centralized testing with school-based evaluations sensitive to the history and needs of each community; and (4) establishing more democratic forms of governance and discipline which foster greater community among students, teachers, and parents while also advancing the individual, legal, and constitutional rights of each. Appended to the booklet are four short biographies, a list of individuals the press may contact for more information, a press release, and a representative list of persons who have endorsed the statement. (JD)

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Education for a Democratic Future

Equity and Excellence: Toward an Agenda for School Reform

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Public Education Information Network

An International Committee of Correspondence for Democratic Schools

Education for a Democratic Future

This statement has been released by The Public Education Information Network, a group of individuals committed to school reforms that foster equity and excellence. Its correspondents include teachers, administrators, educators, scholars, writers, teacher educators, and student advocates, many of whom are directly involved in work in elementary and secondary public schools and classrooms. The network is committed to developing a grassroots information exchange focusing on curriculum, pedagogy, and school governance.

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Equity and Excellence: Toward an Agenda for School Reform

Contents

A call to action		2
An agenda for school reform		3
Options and alternatives		6
I.	Reforming the curriculum	7
II.	School structure and governance	8
III.	Increasing teacher effectiveness	10
IV.	Testing and evaluation	12
V.	Pedagogy and school discipline	15
Endorsements		17

A Call to Action

The present educational reform movement presents an unrivaled opportunity to create what no nation in history as yet achieved: a system of public education that really does educate everybody's children. Our bold democratic experiment is only at its beginning. Our nation has succeeded in providing free schooling for virtually all children. But it has not succeeded in providing every child with a schooling experience that nurtures his or her talents and cultivates independent thinking and learning. We are worried that the current reform movement will stop at superficial reforms, and may in fact get in the way of doing what most needs to be done — developing community and school-level initiatives for reforms. All of us have a common stake in public education. We can agree to disagree on many things as long as together we build national and local coalitions working for schools where students learn the ultimate basic, how to go on learning for a lifetime.

Education for a Democratic Future

Equity and Excellence: Toward an Agenda for School Reform

The Public Education Information Network is a group of teachers, school administrators, professional educators, student and citizen advocates, writers and scholars. Like many Americans, we are concerned about the quality of public schools and actively seek reform. But we are deeply worried that many of the current prescriptions for excellence — more testing of students and teachers, more requirements, more homework, more time in school — are failing to improve the quality of our schools and are, ironically, increasing existing problems.

We have collectively written this agenda in order to stimulate a reexamination of basic questions:

1.) Who should make the decisions about goals, priorities and how to implement school reforms — national or state officials, educational administrators, school boards, teachers, parents?

2.) What is the role of schools in preparing youth for future employment and for participation in their communities?

3.) What are some alternative ways to reform the curriculum and the decision-making structure, increase teacher quality, improve evaluation and testing, and develop greater student responsibility and self discipline?

We hope this statement will prompt a reexamination of these issues and the consideration of a much wider set of options at all levels — local, state, and national.

We have a bias. We believe democratic schools are essential to a democratic nation. What do we mean by this? First, the practice of democracy depends on a system of public education that educates ALL children in the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics to the very highest standard regardless of gender, cultural, racial and social class backgrounds. Excellence in a democracy is not for the favored few but for all. We reject outright the belief that children from any cultural group or socio-economic class have limited potential because of their parents' educational history, social background, or values. Second, in a democracy every person has the right and the responsibility to participate directly in the control and reform of their institutions. Democratic control and management is as essential in schools as it is in all aspects of our work, community, and political lives.

Schools and society

A vision of a more democratic future must guide all efforts to reform our schools. We envision a society where:

- ☐ people share economic and political power at all levels;
- ☐ the young realize their aspirations and talents;
- ☐ there is full and fair employment;
- ☐ persons have greater control of their work lives;
- ☐ individuals gain a sense of belonging;
- ☐ persons live and work in a safe and clean environment;
- ☐ parents raise their children without fear that racial, class, or religious prejudice, war, disease, or starvation, will destroy their futures.

And this vision of society includes a vision of democratic public schools where students:

1. gain the knowledge and develop skills and interests to enable them to pursue individual goals as well as to enter fully into the lives of their communites;
2. are stimulated to think, use their immaginations, and cultivate their talents.
3. are actively engaged in the process of their own learning.

The most serious shortcoming of the highly publicized commission reports on education is their persistent failure to examine the interconnections between the problems of society and the problems of the schools. No matter how well intentioned, prescriptions for more centralized, bureaucratic control of testing, improving curriculum and teacher quality do not address these problems. In many cases, preoccupation with mandates and standards imposed from above diverts public attention from the root problems that must be addressed if our aspirations are to be realized.

Jobs and employment

The unemployment rate in our country is high for all, but especially for youth — 20% of white youth, 16-19 and 50% of black teens are unemployed. Jobs that are increasing the most rapidly are in the service sector and require few skills and minimum education. It is no longer true that hard work and success at school will provide students with secure jobs. The challenge to school reformers is the development of curricula and pedagogy that prepare students to learn how to confront these realities as individuals and as citizens.

Economic and social inequality

Rich and poor are growing further apart, and the middle class which shared the prosperity of the 50's and 60's is loosing ground. These growing disparities are reflected in, and contribute to, the widening gap in the resources available to richer and poorer school districts. These disparities, together with national policies that encourage non-public elementary and secondary schooling, threaten to create a two tier school system: one for the affluent and priviledged; the other for the middle classes and poor.

The threat of nuclear war

Increases in government spending for strategic weapons have reduced public investments for community and family needs, mass transit, recreation, public health, housing, environmental protection — as well as for public education. The confusion of military might with strength distorts the meaning of peace and patriotism, and affects all aspects of social life including the school and its curriculum.

The commitment to the public good and democratic decision-making

It has become the common wisdom that democratic decision-making and providing for the general welfare are impractical in today's highly competitive world. It is also taken as fact by some that an excess of democracy in our schools and other institutions, and government expenditures for the poor and needy, have caused our current economic and social troubles — including the decline of educational standards. These erroneous assumptions undermine efforts to develop more collaborative and democratic processes of decision-making and management. They lead many to place knowledge and skills necessary for self government and individual development — humanities, arts, politics, critical literacy — at the margin, rather than the center of efforts to reform the curriculum.

Options and alternatives

We do not offer prescriptions or mandates. We offer only one recommendation . . .

People in each shool community must develop their own agendas and specific programs for reform. This requires the formation of coalitions of parents, teachers, counselors, librarians and other school based specialists, working in concert with local educational and political officials. Together they would examine existing practices and institute changes.

The greatest challenge to policy-makers and reformers at all levels is to create the conditions and structures that encourage creative and informed community and school initiatives. Advice and involvement of experts and educational officials are often helpful — even essential — for informed decision-making, but they must not dictate the answers.

Significant shifts in responsibility and initiative for school reform to teachers, communities, and local officials require:

- ☐ eliminating existing legislative and fiscal barriers to such initiatives;
- ☐ devising affirmative policies — legislation, fiscal management and administrative practices that encourage initiatives and collective responsibility at the school and community level.

There is no one place to begin the work of developing local agendas and programs. There is no single set of solutions that will serve equity and excellence in all schools and communities. Histories, local problems, practices, and laws vary greatly. Priorities and programs for action must be negotiated from the conflicting interests and values of students, teachers, parents, and citizens.

There are many differing perspectives and conflicts of interest on virtually all school questions. The most difficult dilemmas are: How do we shift to greater school control while preserving the rights of children and minorities? How do we insure professional accountability to governing boards and the communities the schools serve, and at the same time develop ways to institute greater teacher autonomy and responsibility?

In the next several pages we discuss curriculum, school governance, teacher competence and accountability, testing, pedagogy, and discipline. Our purpose is to suggest possibilities and options for change. We ourselves are not unanimous in our support of each of the options and sugges-

tions advanced on the following pages. But we are together in our concern that the debate on the future of education will not move us toward a more democratic future unless we consider alternatives and unless there is collaboration among the various constituencies at the local community and national levels.

I. Reforming the curriculum

In briefest terms the three aspects of a democratic curriculum are:

Critical literacy. This goes beyond learning to read and write to include the motivation and capacity to be critical of what one reads, sees, and hears; to probe beyond surface appearances and question the common wisdom.

Knowledge and understanding of the diverse intellectual, cultural and scientific traditions. We refer not only to the more familiar academic disciplines and traditions of high culture, but to the histories and cultural perspectives of those people, including women and minorities, traditionally excluded from formal study.

Ability to use knowledge and skills to pursue one's own interests; to make informed personal and political decisions; and to work for the welfare of the community.

There are difficult policy issues and dilemmas in realizing these in practice. We cite two:

1. What should be our priorities for the non-college bound student? Should the curriculum focus primarily on saleable job skills and minimum competence in reading, writing and arithmetic? Would the youth of our communities be better served by a broader "basic" curriculum? Such a curriculum would place greater emphasis on the arts, humanities, economics, histories of the people who live in their communities, interpreting popular media and culture, assessing community resources, and working cooperatively with others on community projects. This would enable students to understand the rapidly changing job market and what they can do as individuals and citizens to respond to it.

2. Though S/AT scores appear to be rising, basic issues about the purpose and content of the curricula for college bound youth remain largely unexamined. Many parents, faculty, and counselors in secondary schools and colleges are concerned that college-bound youth are more often driven by a quest for good grades and high test scores than by intrinsic interest in the content of their academic studies. Rarely are they motivated to connect academic learning to their own personal lives or to the

public good. Few venture outside required courses or explore subjects and activities that are not seen as practical for getting into college. Are prescriptions for more homework and courses in the familiar academic subjects, coupled with the emphasis on SAT's, freezing into place the restrictive content and pedagogy that is prevalent in the current academic curriculum? Would college bound youth be better served by a more imaginative and flexible academic curricula: integrative courses and programs in the humanities, arts, sciences, community service, environmental and social studies; programs that foster writing and language across the curriculum?

Should more resources be diverted to developing academic curricula that engage both job and college-bound students in the social, intellectual, and moral questions that face us as individuals and citizens?

Our dilemmas are not only about how the school curriculum should relate to the job market, and what belongs in the academic curriculum. There are other questions. How should knowledge itself be structured? How much and what kind of control should be exerted over students? When and how do we evaluate performance? Which cultural traditions should be given priority? Should human or material resources be allocated to developing musical talents or technical skills — and what kinds of music, which technical skills? Should a second language and more history be required of all — and which language and whose version of history?

II. School structure and governance

The question is not whether we can have schools that promote equity and excellence. Such schools exist in the US, UK, and other democratic nations. (U.S. efforts are documented in Boyer, *High School;* Goodlad, *A Place Called School;* Sizer, *Horace's Compromise;* Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits in Character and Culture,* Ford Foundation's *City High Schools: A Recognition Of Progress.)* The question is how to extend these educational opportunities to all children.

Change on a wider scale, particularly in the larger, urban districts will require challenging the deeply entrenched attitude that bureaucracies and administrative policies are unchangeable.

Many of the current proposals for reform accept as inevitable the top-down bureaucratic structure of public education with administrators and principals conceived as managers of the system, and teachers as lower-level employees bound by the mandates and directives of superiors. This hierarchical model of administrative organization and leadership has an intuitive appeal to many policy-makers and legislators, since it conceives of schooling in business or military terms; as a "delivery system" whose efficiency and productivity may be successfully monitored and improved by

sound centralized management and strong leadership from the boss — the man or woman at the top.

Ironically, by advocating more top-down mandates, we are in effect strengthening a form of management that many successful business leaders and management experts consider shortsighted and inefficient.

Changes will require concerted efforts by teachers, administrators, and parents over the long term. We need not wait for total reform. Immediate goals could include efforts to:

Institute district policies which establish school site-management and fiscal control, and various forms of school-community governance;

Influence state and local officials to introduce more responsive forms of assessment that encourage greater involvement and collective responsibility at the school level by administrators and teachers;

Revise discretionary federal and state regulations to eliminate provisions that impose prescribed procedures (e.g. mandated use of standardized test scores for determining eligibility and evaluating outcomes). These should be replaced with more flexible and permissive guidelines that encourage more creativity and responsibility by teachers, local districts and individual schools

Abolish or significantly modify the practice of centralized state and/or district-wide textbook adoptions.

Reforming the Education and Licensing of School Administrators and Managers

Democratic schools require democratic leaders. Principals, superintendents, and other educational officers are often accustomed by experience and professional training to conceive of their role as managers. Many are unprepared to fulfill their leadership responsibilities in curriculum, evaluation, and pedagogy.

We must reexamine current state licencing practices and the curriculum of professional programs for educational administators and policy planners. The professionalization of school administration over the last fifty years has been a mixed blessing. It has introduced professional standards in an area that often has been, and in some places remains, governed by patronage and political favoritism. On the other hand, too much in the currently required professional training of principals and superintendents is narrowly technical. We need to:

Give consideration to redressing the current over-emphasis on management courses and technique. Administrators need a firm grounding in history and the social sciences, more formal and practical study of human development, policy planning, curriculum, and pedagogy;

Cultivate systematic efforts within our educational leaders toward a greater understanding of the cultures and traditions of the people the schools serve. As for all educational professionals state licencing should require a demonstration of practical performance with less emphasis placed on completion of required courses and professional programs.

III. Increasing Teacher Effectiveness

Teachers, because of their continuous contact with students, are the critical actors in educational reform. Without a competent, inspiring, dedicated teaching staff our reform efforts are incomplete. If good teachers are key to reform in our schools, they must have the autonomy commensurate with this responsibility.

Some argue that prescriptions and close monitoring are necessary because most teachers are unqualified to make curriculum and pedagogical decisions. This position is self-defeating. Over time, more prescriptions, more top-down controls, and centralized testing requires less individual judgment and initiative by teachers. The effect is to erode morale and depress the quality of teaching further. The most competent, thoughtful teachers, the very ones whom we must retain to exercise leadership in the schools, are driven from the profession.

The effort to raise the general standards of teaching in the schools is a long term one. It will involve collective responsibility for developing and maintaining teacher effectiveness. It will require significant initiatives by teachers, teachers organizations and unions.

An agenda for school reform must be grounded in respect for the nature of the day-to-day work of teachers with students in classrooms; it must address what interferes with their ability to successfully teach students.

If teachers are to take individual and collective responsibility for their own performance, they will require a variety of supports:

More time with students and parents; more time for observing and discussing curriculum and pedagogy with other teachers, writers, artists, and various experts in their field, and for planning and evaluating their own and their colleagues' professional performance;

The opportunity for periodic sabbaticals, for sustained study, writing, and keeping current in their chosen areas;

Easy access to available technology, to up-to-date collections of curriculum materials, books, films, computer software, video tapes, and the physical facilities for creating and developing their own curriculum and approaches.

Consideration should be given to *reducing* rather than increasing the classroom contact hours of students and teachers. More time should be available for both to read and plan independently and to engage in evaluation of their own and others' work. Teachers need more time to meet with individual students and parents.

Teachers cannot remain dedicated to a job that barely pays the bills. In most areas and districts substantial across-the-board increases in salaries are essential if we are to improve the morle and competence of teachers. Contrary to popular belief, most teachers work long hours even when holidays and breaks are taken into account. Many are now required to use summer and holiday breaks and after-hours to supplement low salaries, thus distracting them from their primary responsibilities.

The problem of dealing with irresponsible and ineffective teachers must be faced squarely. It is a legitimate concern of the entire community — parents, governing boards, and administrators. However, the teachers themselves must accept collective responsibility for addressing the practical issues of developing programs and devising procedures for working with beginning and marginal teachers, and replacing those who are incompetent or otherwise ill-suited to be teachers.

A variety of systems for teacher peer review recently have been introduced in several districts across the nation. Such efforts require resources and active support of parents, administrators, unions, and professional organizations. Merit pay schemes that reward the few are counterproductive because they generally place more control in the hands of administrators and foster competition rather than cooperation among school faculties.

Reforming teacher education

Those who teach must be knowledgeable in the:

- humanities, arts, and sciences;
- history and everyday politics of public education;
- nature of human learning, language acquisition and development;
- subject they teach;
- craft of teaching or to use the older term, pedagogy;
- cultural traditions and history of the communities they serve.

The challenge of becoming a good teacher is to relate such knowledge to everyday practice. This requires a lifelong effort to look critically at their own teaching and search for alternatives. Strong pre-service preparation and continuing opportunities to learn from and with other teachers are essential. Many teacher education programs are fragmented into academic, 'foundations', and 'methods' courses, and overloaded with requirements for specific courses. Over the last several years, a number of colleges and universities have initiated curricular and structural reforms that seek to: link academic study to school and classroom practice; cultivate closer working relationships with academic specialists, writers, artists and artisans; encourage critical inquiry into curricular and pedagogical practice.

If such efforts are to become the rule rather than the exception, significant structural and curricular reforms will be required in schools of education. Faculty initiatives are not sufficient. We need:

Continuing fiscal and administrative support by university officials and governing boards;

Cooperation of local school districts, professional associations, and unions;

The support of state departments of education and accrediting agencies. Currently, their mandates and prescriptions for particular courses contribute to the fragmentation of the curriculm and the divisions of education faculty into competing departments and programs, thereby discouraging innovation.

Teacher education programs carry special responsibilities for raising the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. But it is not the responsibility of schools and departments of education alone. Institutions of higher education, particularly faculties of arts, sciences, and humanities, must take a more active and affirmative role in educating teachers and in participating with others in the improvement of curricula in our elementary and high schools. Reforms in teacher education can also be stimulated by more flexible, job-related certification requirements. Licensure should place greater emphasis not on test scores or course completions, but on practical demonstration of curricular and pedagogical practice. Teachers should be evaluated for certification on their ability to work successfully with students and colleagues and to deal with the moral, intellectual, physical, and emotional requirements of the job.

IV. Testing and evaluation

In a democracy, citizens, parents, and public officials have the right to know how well schools are fulfilling their responsibilities to students and the communities. Reliable information is necessary for informed decision-making by teachers, educational officials and ordinary citizens. The question is not should we test and evaluate performance, but what forms these assessments should take.

More than any other developed nation on earth, the U.S. takes data generated by mass administration of centrally produced objective tests as the single most meaningful indicator of school quality, teacher competence, and student achievement. The aura of science that surrounds these tests hinders local efforts to develop evaluations that serve individual and social needs. Objective tests have serious problems. Most reduce learning to multiple choice test items that trivialize knowledge and learning. Many are written by testing experts remote from classroom practice and students, and uneducated in the subject fields. Virtually all standardized achievement and competency test batteries ignore significant aspects of

the school curriculum — most notably, writing, the graphic and performing arts, the ability to use critical thought and to engage in subtle and complex interpretation and analysis.

We must reexamine the common wisdom that the use of standardized "instruments" — the California Achievement Test, SAT's, rating scales, questionaires and the like — is necessary for scientific or objective assessments and evaluations of improving school quality.

Teachers are spending more and more class time teaching for tests. Where standardized tests dominate the curriculum, they dictate the content and reduce the method of instruction to a set of routines, and teachers become mere functionaries in a bureaucratic system. Professional testmakers and publishers in effect are making curriculum and pedagogical decisions that properly belong to teachers, principals and others.

We believe the heavy dependence on these forms of evaluation contributes to the deterioration of educational standards, teacher passivity, and a lack of student involvement in academic studies. The greatest problem of using standardized achievement and competency test scores as the measure of the effectiveness of school reforms is that test scores can rise at the same time the quality of the educational experiences in classrooms diminishes.

Tests are often part of a desirable effort to shape up irresponsible school systems, but an exclusive focus on test scores becomes educationally corrupting. The point of reading instruction is, after all, not higher test scores, but children who can read books for a purpose and for enjoyment. The tests are becoming a barrier to the expansion of writing — the most neglected of the 3 R's.

The question of what forms of testing and evaluation are appropriate should be reopened at every level. Are the current expenditures on a very limited and restrictive form of testing cost effective. In *EACH CASE* we must ask whether resources expended on an externally mandated test could be better spent on forms of evaluation that encourage closer collaboration between teachers and students, and lead more directly to improvement in student motivation and learning.

The need for comparative performance data for various public policy purposes (such as monitoring federal and state equity requirements and allocating grants and financial aid) could be met in ways which do not carry the massive human and financial costs of large scale centralized, state or district-wide testing programs. Such costs include not only the price of the tests themselves, but the administrative overhead at state and local levels for staff, facilities, and equipment so that all this information -- (much of which is never used — can be scored, summarized, and stored.

The development of effective evaluations requires a recognition of the enormous potential and range of the human mind, and a respect for the diversity and complexity of human cultures. Current pencil and paper objective testing techniques cannot assess such qualities and traits with much subtlety or precision.

Standardized achievement and competency tests need not be totally eliminated, but their use should be drastically curtailed. Resources should be diverted to development and use of more subtle, sensitive and educationally useful forms of assessment. A priority should be placed on initiating and supporting self evaluations at the school site by teachers, principals and community.

Many stystematic forms of empirical evaluation and testing have been developed and are in use in this and other technologically advanced nations. To be considered are:

Portfolios or profiles. These require a systematic plan for collecting and assessing documentary evidence, and testimony of student performance and achievements.

School site evaluation teams. These may be composed of a designated group of teachers, parents and subject-matter experts from area colleges, and consultants in curriculum and pedagogy. Their evaluations would depend on interview, systematic observation, recording and analysis of curriculum, pedagogy, and the teaching and learning environment.

Group and individual diagnoses of student achievement and potential. These may include diagnostic tests, structured and unstructured observations of student performance, and interviews.

There is no scientific basis, or practical need for continued use of IQ and general "aptitude" tests as indices of native intelligences, talent, or general intellectual potential.

Evaluations must not ignore the equity questions, the issues of gender, racial, religious, and cultural bias implicit in tests and other procedures. This applies to the content of test items, the type of test, how and by whom it is administered, and the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures used to summarize information and data.

We appreciate that testing is a lever to make previously unaccountable schools and even whole systems accountable, especially for the children of minorities. We understand that testing is part of the way school systems in

many places are trying to restore good faith and a measure of order in what were chaotic and irresponsible systems. However, we believe there are better and more convincing ways to evaluate school and individual progress. And we worry about how reliance on mass testing will effect teachers and the educational experience of children.

V. Pedagogy And School Discipline

Although learning in school cannot be interesting to all students at all times, there is a serious problem when so many students from all social groups and classes find school boring and irrelevant to daily life. Few, including those who take school very seriously, have experienced the joy and exhileration of self directed study.

The medium cannot be separated from the message. Arbitrary control and a pedagogy that emphasizes passive reception of knowledge, where students are asked to regurgitate, to quote Mark Twain, "petrified opinion" are not only inappropriate preparation for democratic citizenship, but are ideal ways to discourage interest and achievement.

An engaging pedagogy and democratic class discipline are at the heart of school reform.

The common wisdom is: (1) there is a general laxness in classroom and school discipline that can be traced to misguided efforts during the sixties and seventies, to install humanistic, child-centered philosophy and practices in our schools by progressive teachers and school officials; (2) students today will learn only if forced to do so; this is because of TV and other distractions, disinterested parents etc.

Neither of these claims can be supported by the evidence. A visit to almost any local elementary or secondary school will confirm that students' behavior is carefully monitored and directed throughout the school day in the classrooms, corridors, and school grounds. Recent descriptive school studies, as well as those conducted over the last forty years, have shown what many of us know from first hand experience — there is no absence of tight adult control in American schools. To the contrary, students almost never participate in curriculum decisions, ask few

questions in class, and rarely are expected to take the initiative for their own learning. The poorer the community the school serves, the greater the likelihood of more centralized decision-making and of the use of punitive sanctions for violations of school regulations.

In some areas schools have become battlegrounds. The violence of the society does not stop at the school door. Violence to persons and property cannot be condoned in or outside the school. Neither will it be eliminated by tougher disciplinary codes that do not adequately respect and protect the constitutional and legal rights of students, parents and school staff.

Discipline in a democracy requires self discipline. The ability to make sound decisions grows out of a base of youthful experience with democracy — opportunities for significant participation in self-government, pursuing individual interests in depth, discussing issues with others. Teachers cannot relinquish their responsibility for instructional decisions and for maintaining classroom discipline. But being an authority is not synonymous with being authoritarian. Control that rests largely on imposed obedience is at best a temporary measure, and ultimately self defeating. Heavy-handed or arbitrary control breeds resistance — truancy, disruption, antipathy to learning and to legitimate democratic authority.

There are numerous examples of schools at all socio-economic levels where students are given autonomy appropriate to their maturity.

Many teachers have developed pedagogy that builds upon students' own knowledge and interests, and leads them to incorporate realms of public knowledge; that teaches students to look critically at taken-for-granted perspectives as well as to respect traditions and democratic values; that stimulates intrinsic interest as well as requires students to master skills and ideas they do not see as immediately useful.

Close monitoring, ubiquitous boredom and the resistance and antagonism they engender are neither necessary or inevitable. We believe:

1.) Teachers must accept the responsibility for continuing self and peer evaluation of their curriculum, pedagogy, and control practices; they must develop approaches that prepare students for participation in a democratic society.

2.) Administrators, communities, professional associations, and institutions of higher learning must provide the requisite moral, intellectual and material support, if teachers are to fulfill their responsibilities to their students and their communities..

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An International Committee of Correspondence for Democratic Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LEADING EDUCATORS CALL FOR LOCAL REFORM INITIATIVES BY TEACHERS AND PARENTS

St. Louis, MO, February 6, 1985 -- The Public Education Information Network, a committee of correspondence for democratic schools, released a statement today in Washington, D.C., calling for more teacher and community autonomy and responsibility for creating schools dedicated to principles of equity, excellence, and democracy. The statement is titled Equity and Excellence: Toward and Agenda for School Reform.

The grass-roots group is a network of leading public school educators, speaking as individuals and not on behalf of any group or institution.

The network's statement recommends alternatives and options for improving curriculum, school governance, teacher effectiveness, testing, discipline, and pedagogy. Among the options are: abandoning centrally mandated textbooks, instituting peer review of teachers by their colleagues, replacing centralized testing with school-based evaluations that are sensitive to the history and needs of each community, and establishing more democratic forms of governance and discipline which foster greater community among students, teachers, and parents while also advancing the individual, legal, and constitutional rights of each.

More than 180 prominent teachers, administrators, teacher-educators, and

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researchers have endorsed the statement calling for action in each individual school by parents and teachers.

The statement declares, "We have a bias. We believe democratic schools are essential to a democratic nation. What do we mean by this? First, the practice of democracy depends on a system of public education that educates ALL children . . . to the very highest standard regardless of gender, cultural, racial and social class backgrounds. . . . Second, in a democracy every person has the right and the responsibility to participate directly in the control and reform of their institutions."

The Public Education Information Network's statement suggests that the economic and social problems of society do not stop at the school door. "Unemployment among teens seeking work is rampant," said Harold Berlak, a teacher-educator from Washington University in St. Louis, and the network's national secretary. "We cannot expect schools to create jobs or solve society's problems. But they can educate the citizens of tomorrow who must confront these problems in their own communities. We know that top-down mandates don't work. Strong local participation in decision-making by everyone is as needed to address the current problems of schools as it is needed to address the current problems of American industry."

"There are no panaceas, no simple answers to the problems facing our schools," said Jerome Winegar, headmaster of South Boston High School. "The problems are long-term, and can only be solved by committed and creative individuals working classroom by classroom, school by school, and community by community."

Copies of the report released in Washington may be obtained from Public Education Information Network, Campus Box 1183, Washington University, St. Louis, MO 63130.

Add Two

Among the 180 persons in 20 states who endorsed the statement are many regionally and locally known school administrators, teachers and teacher-educators, as well as the following nationally recognized scholars and leaders who are active in school reform:

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This is the first in a series of pamphlets discussing these and other educational issues related to democratic school reforms.

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